

XXVII.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

Siamese Birds.

SIR,—It has been pointed out to me by you that I have omitted to cite types for a number of the races proposed in my recent paper (*antea*, pp. 76-114, 180-234). For various reasons I have deliberately refrained from doing so in the case of those specimens which are not in my own collection, but in connection with them have given a typical locality (the only or first place mentioned) which I hope will identify the geographical forms with sufficient preciseness. I hope later to publish data of heautotypes if meanwhile plesiotypes have not been selected by other ornithologists.

My bird, the type of *Chloropsis aurifroas inornatus*, was, however, not specially mentioned; it is the first specimen recorded, the adult male with measurements, and was collected on 14 October, 1916.

The type of *Gecinus viridis robinsoni* is an adult female from Ginting Bidai, Selangor-Pahang Boundary, Malay States, 2000 ft. Collected by myself on 5 April, 1917, and now in the collection of the Federated Malay States Museums.

I wish to correct an error in my remarks under *Dissemurus paradiseus malayensis* (p. 229). I was at fault in stating that this name of Blyth's was first published by Jerdon as *Edolius malayensis*; it was first published by Blyth himself [Journ. Asiat. Soc. Bengal, xxviii. p. 272 (1859)] in connection with Andamanese and Malayan birds.

The former were afterwards separated by Beavan as *Edolius affinis* (Ibis, 1867, p. 323), but the name is antedated by *Edolius affinis* Blyth [Journ. Asiat. Soc. Bengal, xi. p. 174 (1842)] for a form of *Dicrurus* of the Malay Peninsula, and Richmond has substituted for it *Dissemurus malabaricus otiosus* [Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus. xxv. p. 290 (1902)].

Obviously Blyth proposed *malayensis* with special reference to Malayan birds, but an Andamanese specimen was mentioned first, and in order to prevent attempt to upset more recent nomenclature and to avoid the confusion which the application of *malayensis* to the Andamanese race would cause, I now restrict it to the form occurring in the Malay Peninsula north of lat. 4°; the types would be the specimens from Penang mentioned by Blyth in his original description, if in existence.

An author is at a disadvantage in not being able to revise his proofs, and the following corrections should be made to my paper:—

Species No. 4,	line 1,	for (Blyth) read (Swinhoe).
„ 49,	„ 4,	„ p. 317 „ p. 89.
„ 51,	„ 23,	„ east „ west.
„ 55,	„ 23,	„ <i>wrayi</i> Grant, read <i>rodgeri</i> Hart. & Butler.
„ 60,	„ 23,	„ Lang Kawi „ Langkawi.
„ „	„ 45,	„ „ „ „
„ „	„ 48,	„ „ „ „
„ 62,	„ 15,	between white and tail-feathers insert patches on the.
„ 67,	„ 29,	for five read fine.
„ 73,	„ 31,	„ dull „ gull.
„ „	„ 42,	„ „ „ „
„ 76,	„ 5,	between near and Liant insert Cape.
„ 78,	„ 5,	for males read male.
„ 87,	„ 22,	„ Japan „ Javan.
„ 88,	„ 2,	„ 1890 „ 1900.

Kuala Lumpur,
12 February, 1918.

C. BODEN KLOSS.

Australian Parrots.

SIR,—The rather irreconcilable views which Mr. Mathews and I appear to hold, show, I think, that there is room for considerable investigation of the plumage-changes and external sexual differences of the Australian Parrots.

I do not like to appear to doubt the accuracy of Mr. Mathews' collectors, but I must say I should be exceedingly interested and very surprised if he could tell me that he had himself examined in the flesh any of the following:—

1. An *adult* male Roseate or Leadbeater's Cockatoo with a red or pale brown iris.
2. An *adult* female Roseate or Leadbeater's Cockatoo with a black iris.
3. A female *Platycercus icterotis*, with normal reproductive organs, with the entire head, neck, and breast bright crimson, unmarked with green or yellow, and bright yellow cheek-patches like a male's.
4. A female *Purpureicephalus spurius*, with normal reproductive organs, which has a bright red cap, unmarked with green, and cheeks as bright as a fully-plumaged male's.

It does seem strange that all, or nearly all, birds of the species just mentioned, that have been imported alive into England, should belong to local races possessing peculiarities which have not been detected in Australia—especially so in the case of the Roseate Cockatoo which used to be brought over in hundreds.

I can quite understand that preserved skins would not show a difference in size between the heads of male and female *Platycercus* and *Barnardius* Parrakeets, but I should expect a difference in skull measurements, and also a constant superiority of males over females of the same age and race in the measurement of the upper mandible across its widest portion.

I must suspend judgment on the question of the age at which *Platycercine* Parrakeets assume adult plumage in their native land, but it is a very odd thing and quite contrary to the whole experience of aviculture, if conditions of captivity which lower the bird's vitality and tend to

impair its health, should, in the case of this one group, stimulate the assumption of adult plumage at an abnormally early age. Indeed, it is incredible that the same conditions of captivity can cause a cock Stanley Parrakeet to come into full colour a year or two before the natural time and yet keep a hen in semi-immature dress all her life. Mr. Mathews will pardon me if I suggest that it can hardly be an "easy" matter to ascertain by observation of unmarked wild birds, of a rather wandering disposition, the exact period taken by a particular individual to assume adult plumage—when that period is more than 12 months. It would, I know, bother me exceedingly to prove by observation of wild Herring-Gulls that the time they took to lose their immature dress in confinement was abnormal, and longer or shorter than the natural one.

Although I have examined some dozens of birds, many of them in "importation" plumage, coming from different regions, I have never seen an adult male *Platycercus eximius* with any but red feathers round the eye and never an adult female which had not a few tiny greenish ones. The latter, however, would not be likely to be visible in a skin which had not been very carefully prepared. The figure of *Neophema venusta* interested me as it represented a bird with a decidedly golden head. I have had quite a number of *N. venusta* of both sexes and never yet saw one with the head of a different shade from the rest of the body; some of my birds were said to have come from Tasmania.

It does seem a very great pity that Australian naturalists should have taken no serious steps to preserve some of their beautiful Parrakeets from extinction by breeding them in captivity. Once the numbers of a certain species have become so reduced that their annual increase does not equal the toll taken by enemies, natural and otherwise, the fate of that species, in a wild state, is sealed, and strict laws against capture and export alive to other countries are useless, or worse than useless. The average Australian's idea of aviculture, as far as native Parrakeets are concerned,

appears to be keeping them in small cages, for which they are unsuited, and trying to teach them to talk, for which they have little aptitude. Many of the very last living examples of the Turquoise, Splendid Grass-Parrakeet, and Beautiful Parrakeet appear, from enquiries I have made, to have ended their days as cage-birds, whereas, if their owners had had the sense to give them proper aviary accommodation, they might have perpetuated the species indefinitely and made a handsome profit for their own pockets.

Given a favourable climate, Parrakeets are among the easiest of birds to breed in confinement if adult pairs are kept separate and are provided with plenty of green food as well as seed. Grass-Parrakeets need to have the outer flight of their aviary lined with string-netting, as they are very prone to kill themselves by flying against wire, but in all other respects they are as easy to manage as their common relatives.

Your obedient servant,

TAVISTOCK.

Victoria Barracks,
Portsmouth.

1 May, 1918.

Protection of Birds.

SIR,—The serious diminution in the numbers of our resident insect-eating birds, which resulted from the severe winter of 1916–17, and also from the widespread destruction of birds and eggs in the summer of 1917, is a cause for grave anxiety at the present time.

Plagues of insect-life of various kinds were reported in the summer and autumn from many districts, and but for the services of summer migrants would have proved alarmingly destructive to corn, grass, and green crops and to fruit. This year a similar and greater danger faces us. Under the most favourable conditions it must be some years before many of our small birds regain their normal status. The continual ploughing up of old grassland multiplies insect-pests; the increased crops afford them

increased food and thus stimulate the hatching out of countless swarms.

Owing to these circumstances the protection and preservation of insect-eating birds, and of those birds which destroy small vermin, is a matter of urgent necessity. If the country is to have a sufficiency of food-crops, those crops must not merely be planted and tended; they must be guarded as far as possible from the perpetual menace of ravage and devastation by insects. Hand-labour is wholly inadequate to the task, even if it were abundantly to be had.

We therefore strongly urge that, in the interests of national food-supplies, this matter be taken up promptly by Agricultural bodies, by Gardening and Allotment associations, and by elementary and secondary schools, with a view to checking the destruction of useful birds and their nests and eggs, and the preservation of insect-eating species, both resident and migratory.

Difference of opinion exists as to the economic status of a few species; but all who have studied economic ornithology and entomology are agreed (1) that the great majority of wild birds are beneficial to man; (2) that the insect-eating and vermin-eating species in particular are invaluable to him in field and gardens; (3) that children should not be permitted to take part in the destruction of birds and eggs even of species deemed injurious, since useful ones inevitably suffer also.

BEDFORD.

G. L. COURTHOPE, Major, M.P.

ARTHUR DENDY, F.R.S., Professor of Zoology in the University of London.

F. W. GAMBLE, D.Sc., F.R.S., Professor of Zoology, University of Birmingham.

J. STANLEY GARDINER, F.R.S., F.L.S., Professor of Zoology, University of Cambridge.

S. F. HARMER, F.R.S., Keeper of Zoology, British Museum (Natural History).

- W. A. HERDMAN, D.Sc., LL.D., F.R.S., Professor of Zoology,
University of Liverpool.
- SYDNEY F. HICKSON, D.Sc., F.R.S., Professor of Zoology,
Victoria University of Manchester.
- H. H. JOHNSTON, G.C.M.G., D.Sc.
- E. G. B. MEADE-WALDO, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U.
- P. CHALMERS MITCHELL, F.R.S., Secretary, Zoological Society
of London.
- ROBERT NEWSTEAD, M.Sc., F.R.S., Professor of Entomology,
University of Liverpool.
- W. R. OGILVIE-GRANT, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U., Keeper of Orni-
thology, British Museum.
- MONTAGU SHARPE, D.L., Chairman of Council, Royal Society
for the Protection of Birds.
- J. ARTHUR THOMSON, LL.D., Regius Professor of Natural
History in the University of Aberdeen.

The B. O. U. and Modern Nomenclature.

SIR,—In view of what transpired at the Annual General Meeting of the B. O. U. on March 13th, and of the regrettable difference of opinion that exists in regard to the present method of “advancing” ornithology, I ask myself the question whether, at my time of life, it is worth while to remain a member of the Union, now no longer deserving of the name. It seems to me that the time has arrived for me to come to some decision in the matter. One must either continue to be a member of the Union and *support* it, or *leave* it. I have decided to leave it for the following, amongst other reasons, to which I have already referred in a letter, of which only a portion was printed, in the last number of ‘The Ibis.’

I feel that I can no longer subscribe to a journal which, in spite of remonstrance,

- (1) Disregards the Stricklandian Code of Rules for Zoological Nomenclature, which was unanimously approved in 1842, 1863, 1878, and 1908 by committees of eminent British biologists ;

- (2) Causes great confusion and a palpable injustice to Linnæus (in violation of the Stricklandian Code) by substituting the 10th edition of the 'Systema Naturæ' for the 12th and last edition revised and amended by the author in 1766; and
- (3) Ignores the simplicity and time-honoured employment of binomial names by making extravagant use of trinomials, which I regard as not only undesirable (with certain exceptions) but fantastical, and in many cases ridiculous.

The absurdity to which such a system has now been reduced may be seen in a list of 180 birds published in the last number of 'The Ibis' (April 1918, pp. 258-287). About five-sixths of them are designated by trinomials, and although the majority are amongst the most familiar of our British birds, they are so disguised by this new-fangled nomenclature as to be unrecognizable except by the vernacular English names appended. Many of them, moreover, bear different names on different pages of the same volume, testifying to the want of uniformity in the nomenclature adopted.

Weary of protesting against these objectionable features in a journal designed to *advance* the study of ornithology, I can no longer subscribe to the publication of views which I do not share, and I have therefore requested that my name may be removed from the list of Members of the British Ornithologists' Union. I have neither time nor inclination for further discussion on the subject.

Your obedient servant,

Weybridge, June 1, 1918.

JAMES EDMUND HARTING.

[With regard to the points raised in Mr. Harting's letter, we think almost all ornithologists must agree that if our science is to remain bound to the Stricklandian Code of 1842 there can be very slight hope of any progress. Progress means change, absence of change means stagnation.

Apart from this, there is a great English-speaking nation across the Atlantic who must be taken into account, unless our science is to be involved in hopeless confusion.

In regard to the second paragraph, we may say that we are, so far as our own private views are concerned, quite in agreement with him, and we regret as much as he does the substitution of the 10th for the 12th edition of Linnæus's 'Systema' as the starting-point of nomenclature. The matter was decided, however, by the committee appointed to report on the rules of zoological nomenclature by the International Zoological Congress in 1897, and the decision was accepted by the Congress itself, and it appears to us that it is our duty to accept such a decision if it will lead to uniformity and fixity. To go back now to the 12th edition would make confusion worse confounded.

We do not think any present-day worker in systematic ornithology can ignore subspecies or their true significance and utility. Some authors may carry the matter too far, and propose to recognize differences between local forms imperceptible to other workers; but, after all, even our predecessors often did the same thing in regard to what they termed species.

Finally, in regard to the paper by Miss Baxter and Miss Rintoul in the last number of 'The Ibis,' we would point out that the nomenclature follows exactly that laid down in the recently published 'B. O. U. List,' except that the specific name is in many cases repeated to show that the authors are alluding to the typical, which is in most cases the British race, and not to the species in its wider sense. How, therefore, Mr. Harting can say that "they are so disguised by this new-fangled nomenclature as to be unrecognizable" passes our comprehension.—ED.]

SIR,—Mr. Harting apparently bases his right to dictate to the Editor of 'The Ibis,' the compilers of the 'B. O. U. List,' and those of the 'Hand List' on the ground that he

has been for fifty years a member of the British Ornithologists' Union. The first personal pronoun occurs no fewer than twenty times in this remarkable letter.

As a field naturalist Mr. Harting has recorded his discovery of the Stonechat nesting deep in a hole in an old stone wall, and has obtained eggs of the Long-eared Owl from a hollow tree. His suggested identification of *Bambusicola* as a hybrid between the Pheasant and Partridge is fresh in the minds of readers of the 'Field.' His discovery that the Ring-Ouzel is resident in the British Isles, and the publication of a 'Handbook of British Birds,' in which full details of some 33 occurrences of the Great Black Woodpecker are given (not one of which is worthy of credit), certainly form a remarkable record, but one which will scarcely give him the right to speak *ex cathedra* on ornithology.

We may take it for granted, then, that Mr. Harting's claim is based on seniority. But if we alter all our system of nomenclature and break away from the International Rules to please the senior member of the Union, are we not faced with the possibility that twenty or thirty years hence the oldest member may be one of the present younger generation? In that case we should only be following precedent by altering the names again in accordance with his views, and this process might be repeated indefinitely.

The suggestion is really too puerile for serious consideration, but one would think that even Mr. Harting would have realized by this time that ornithology is not merely the hobby of a clique of English writers, but a section of zoology and a world-wide study. Scientific nomenclature which is confined to one country is worthless, as to be of any value it should be universal. This can only be gained by strict and loyal observance of rules.

It is curious that the one really serious error committed by the B. O. U. Committee is selected for commendation by Mr. Harting. To form a list of *nomina conservanda* and

to publish it after submitting it to the International Committee was quite justifiable, but the correct names under the rules should have been given, and not replaced by *nomina conservanda*, without the sanction of the Committee, as has unfortunately been done. If other countries follow suit and restore discarded names at will, we are brought face to face with nomenclatural confusion once more. With equal reason might the ornithologists of Hampshire declare that they proposed to return to the scientific names used by Gilbert White!

Recent events might have taught us that there is a world outside the limits of the British Isles, and that in the United States alone we have an English-speaking nation a hundred millions strong. Surely we gain more by discarding the ill-omened name of *boschas*, to which Mr. Chapman is so devoted, and adopting the strictly correct name of *platyrhyncha*, which is known and understood from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Yours &c.,

F. C. R. JOURDAIN.

Appleton Rectory,
Abingdon, Berkshire.
3 June, 1918.

Beebe's Monograph of the Pheasants.

The first volume of this beautiful work (which has been in preparation for some years) is now ready. It is the most complete work ever prepared on the subject, and is illustrated with coloured plates (by the best artists) depicting the Pheasants of the world, and many photographs. Only a limited number of sets will be available for the British Empire, which can be obtained through the English publishers, Messrs. Witherby & Co.